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TODAY'S EDITORIAL

In Our View: Sensible water plan for Nipomo

Nipomo may be running out of water, and the folks responsible for managing that resource don't seem to know what to do about it.

The Nipomo Community Services District board is in the midst of a debate that pits water conservation against raising rates to discourage water use. The first approach obviously would be voluntary, while the second proposal might prove prohibitive with regard to the community's coveted rural image.

In the end, this discussion will almost certainly focus on the bottom-line issue — the need to conserve water — and it seems evident that a multitiered rate structure is the only logical way to achieve enough water savings.

In fact, as Nipomo and other communities along the Central Coast grow into the future, it should be obvious to everyone that water conservation programs, backed up by rate structures that escalate the cost for those who use more water, is the only viable option.

NCSD board members fret that charging big users more will discourage use, and therefore pose a risk to the community's rural atmosphere. Surely they realize also that doing otherwise imperils all Nipomo water users. Of what use is a big, heavily landscaped lot, when the water's gone?

Nipomo even has a working model for a multitiered rating system. Arroyo Grande uses such a structure with gratifying results — an estimated 10-percent reduction in water use since embarking on a four-tier system that increases costs as water use increases.

NCSD staff proposed just such a system, but the recommendation was rejected by the board. In fact, staff experts feel so strongly about a tiered system that they've brought the proposal back — despite the board's objections.

This is one time board members should take the advice of experts. It is true that a tiered rate system could change the face of Nipomo. But the even more important truth is that continuing without such a rate structure endangers the community's water supply. And the thing about a ground water basin is, when it's empty, that's it.

The NCSD board should approve both a tough conservation program and a tiered rate structure. It's the smart thing to do